

From: Andrew Sterian
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/23/02 10:53am
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

I am writing to comment upon the proposed Microsoft settlement. I am disappointed at the proposed settlement and believe that it does not provide sufficient remedies to restore meaningful competition to the marketplace.

I am an Assistant Professor of Engineering at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In the field of engineering, there are several important software tools that define the state-of-the-art in engineering practice. The majority of these tools require the Microsoft Windows operating system. In effect, the future of American engineering depends upon Microsoft. This places the U.S.A. in a very precarious position.

When our engineering department buys a new computer, we have no choice but to buy it pre-installed with the latest Microsoft operating system. By charging computer manufacturers for an operating system license for each computer sold, regardless of whether the computer actually has the operating system installed, the computer manufacturer faces extreme pressure to do as Microsoft says and pre-load the computer with the most recent release of the Microsoft Windows operating system. Previous versions of the operating system are simply not available. This is the cause of the "upgrade treadmill." Engineering software developers must spend considerable resources to upgrade their software for compatibility with the newest release of the Microsoft Windows operating system. Engineering departments and students must pay for the newest operating system version and for new versions of the software.

This "upgrade treadmill" benefits no-one except Microsoft. The software developers must run fast just to keep up, purchasers of the software must upgrade to the latest version in order to maintain compatibility with the latest Microsoft operating system, and our higher education system, both the universities and the students, must pay for both the new operating system and the new version of the engineering software. There are simply no other options as long as Microsoft continues to force its upgrades on us.

The proposed Microsoft settlement does nothing to break this cycle. Until engineering software developers have a choice of whether or not they must support the latest Microsoft operating system, this costly treadmill will continue, and the engineering skill and talent of Americans will become vulnerable to foreign competition and to the whims of Microsoft.

Sincerely,

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